the house across the way

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the house across the way

by accideadly

Summary

In the house across the street, a new man moves in.

Will quickly finds himself utterly taken with him - but do his own thoughts come to cloud his judgement on the way the good doctor see him?

Notes

I will add tags as I go, but these are ones I already know are going to be in here at some point.

I would not say this is not strictly dead dove, but it's dark enough ya know. So if you aren't comfortable then please don't read it :)

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

The house across the street from Will's had been empty since he moved in six months ago. All dark brick and high Victorian windows; a vacant space between two abodes which seemed constant in their rejuvenation of tenants. To the left was a family home, a little smaller than the middle house, but full of children. It had taken Will weeks to figure out just how many children they had had. It was a definite five with a sixth on the way.

On the other side, the house had been converted into flats; usually occupied by young couples or working professionals who had just moved out and wanted to prove their worth to the world – they would only last a few months before vacating somewhere more appropriate. Cheaper. Closer to the city. Somewhere with a more appealing nightlife. Less creepy. There seemed far more reasons for these people to leave than there were to stay.

The noise and duress that poured from those houses made the void of the house that sat between them ever more present. Murky dark shadows lingered through the glass, stared at Will, and Will could never help but stare back. Wondering, imagining his neighbour until he sometimes forgot there was no one there at all. It was far more entertaining than the computer screen which sat before him. It had been two years since Will got the job as a journalist and one year and seven months since they had let him – *suggested to him* – that he work from home. Journalism had never been a calling; it was just what he had settled for after deciding that being a cop was not for him (or rather being unable to pass the psych eval). It wasn't particularly enthralling, but it paid well enough. It was a job.

Half-finished articles on cold cases and mysterious happening sat on his desktop staring, pleading to be picked back up. But it was *not the direction of the publication* and Will was quite the fan of being paid for his work. Will had always wondered if he should just publish them of his own fruition, but his words would quickly get buried amongst forum threads and no one who could actually do anything about it would ever see them. If it weren't for how he loathed Freddie Lounds, perhaps he would work for her, *let her post his work on TattleCrime*. The thought repulsed him.

He continued his research into the thrilling case of the botched pipeline construction which had gone to the firm who put in the lowest offer and thus left half a community without running water for weeks. The article would be posted at midnight. Will would go to sleep and awake to a shitstorm; the crumbling façade of some governor stepping down, an overnight bankruptcy claim from a leeching construction company, it was always a joy to see the havoc. But Will would wake up, walk the dogs, delete half the emails in his inbox and work on whatever assignment his boss next sent through. The world would have turned on its axis, but nothing will have changed for Will Graham. Chilling in the eye of the storm of his making.

It was 1 am by the time Will returned from walking the dogs. Or more accurate the big dogs walking him while the little ones trudged behind. He did feel bad keeping them boxed away in the apartment – but anywhere with a private garden was entirely out of his price range.

This place was out of his price range. He had Alana's girlfriend to thank for it. Perhaps it should feel pitiful, a knock to his pride, to be leeching off your ex's new wife who was richer, fancier and superior-in-every-way than what Will had provided. But Margot and her discounts were nice, Alana was nicer, and Will was broke. Not enough places around here would allow a hermit and his seven dogs, so he was past the point of caring.

All the lights were out on the street now; Will the only thing with awake and weary eyes. Even the young things in the house on the right had drawn their curtains and called it a night. He trudged up the cold stairwell, as quiet as it was possible to be with a veritable army of hounds in toe. By design, Will had never met the person who lived below him; they seemed to occupy the place only about a fifth of the time. Will knew they went to a boring office job in the city in the week, and bars and clubs on weekends; their schedule tired him to even think about. The less time they were there the better, Will liked to feel as if he was the only occupier of the building. Other than the dogs, of course.

As he bundled himself and the dogs through the door, he pulled out his phone. A missed call from Alana 35 minutes ago. He opened her chat and quickly typed; it was too late to call back now and Will wouldn't have even if it wasn't.

Will

Sorry, Alana, just saw your call. How are you?

Alana

I saw the story, Will. Congratulations! We must catch up soon.

Will

Thank you. Yes, we should.

They *should.* But would they ever. It had been over a month and guilt and relief circled Will in equal measure. Alana was lovely, all the care and concern in the world poured out and embraced whoever she could manage to get a hold of. It was a sweet comfort until it was a choking embrace; until her silence and her kind eyes were more akin to daggers. She was probably right in her every suggestion, she *only wanted the best for him* , and Will believed it. But perhaps he didn't want the best for himself. The daggers were in his own hands, waiting in a self-sacrificial position.

He kicked off his trousers and rolled into bed; content with the view of the house across the street which the large window allowed him. His apartment was on the third floor, and with no one across the street Will never felt the burden to close the blinds. If the alarm somehow failed to wake him up; at least the sun would remember. It wasn't as if he could be late; his workplace was five feet ahead of him. But if he woke up later than 6 am, he might miss the

happenings of the world. Perhaps he did not wish to partake in the goings-on of the outside world, but he was loathed to miss the microcosm which unwound on the pavement below.

Will awoke; not the agonising ringing of the alarm or the blinding sun, but a loud engine spluttering outside. He pulled his phone towards him and squinted at the time; 5.47 am. At least it wasn't too early. Alana and his boss had both messaged him; he loathed it when they messaged more than one text at a time and he wasn't able to pull down the notification to read the entire thing. Twenty-three new emails in his inbox: Not bad. Once he had woken up to forty-seven and deleted them all without reading a single one.

His boss' last message read ' *God Graham, you are GOOD - Just got a cease and...* '

Alana's second message read ' *If that doesn't work, we could always do it n...* '

With hands rubbing into his tired eyes, he watched as three men in black shirts and khaki trousers jumped out of the front of the large semi which had *Greystone Relocation Services* printed on the side. They darted to the back and quickly began the task ahead. Will's eyes were fixed as he watched desks and bookshelves, couches and side tables, box after box.

Someone was moving into the empty house.

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It was 6.35 am by the time Hannibal's Bentley pulled up outside. For a moment he watched, waiting to see whether the movers were providing the esteemed service they had claimed to offer. Caution seemed to run rife beneath each movement of tensed muscles as they hauled in the mahogany cabinets – Hannibal was satisfied enough. The plans he had made were pristine, down to the placement of each book. While he was certain the young men before him would follow it as well as they could, he only expected so much. Regardless, Hannibal would have to rearrange the place to accommodate the things which he had transported himself. Not everything was destined for the eyes of the public; it felt alien enough to allow these men into his home and to touch the things that created the image of *Dr Hannibal Lecter* .

He stepped out of the car and looked up to revel at what was now his. The house was perfect – the estate agent had said that it hadn't been lived in for ten years. The neighbourhood was prestigious enough, quiet enough. Its modest garden backed onto a thicket of pine trees which cast a darkness upon them that no soul would cross. Hannibal's eyes had grown painfully accustomed to the gaudy style which Victorian-era houses took on in this part of the world. But this was the nicest he had seen; its creator had followed the traditions that created such a building and made each their own. Beauty had been found amongst ostentatious fads.

Its colouration was all greys bar the moulding and trim around the doors and windows which were a forest green hue and matched perfectly to the trees behind. The Ionic columns notably of the 'Greek Revival' were thankfully absent; the thought of such pale imitations being lauded as a revival of the real thing was enough to make Hannibal's stomach turn. A simple floral pattern had been carved into the frieze and the moulding; it seemed akin to the Egyptian blue water lily. As the sun rose the raised designs would become prominent against their shadows, and once dusk fell the flowers would be lost amongst the murk. It seemed a feminine touch that spoke of the necessity of beauty, the shield *she* had worn to adhere to the world's expectations.

This house was inviting and warm; but still imposing against the more modern buildings around it. The old stomping ground had soured; strings of murders and brutality had begun to drive away the more cautious amongst his patients. While the job often bored him so, to have nothing to do was endlessly more boring still. He hoped that the new abode, the new neighbourhood might better serve his interests. Despite his endless neuroticism, Franklyn had been most displeased to hear that their therapy would have to be delayed two weeks while he was relocating. His appointment was in six days, the inaugural appointment in his new abode. Everything would have to be perfect by then.

By the third day, the house was in such a way that it was a wonder that Hannibal had not been residing there for years. Everything just so. So perfectly fitting into the new dimensions of the space, that it was a wonder that anyone could have ever lived in this house but Hannibal Lecter. It was designed for him.

His office was on the ground floor; the first door you came across after stepping across the threshold. The foyer contained little more than a row of plush chairs and a coat rack; nothing that told anything of the person who lived beyond the walls. On the wall across from the waiting room seats, a single piece of art adorned the walls. *A Hare in the Forest* was not necessarily his usual taste, but something about it spoke to him. Lit with a dramatic unrealism that showed off every facet, the painting was not scared to reveal itself and yet amongst all the chaos, small elements were bound to be missed. He hid nothing of *Dr Hannibal Lecter* from the world, he too was a perfectly framed portrait. If anyone missed what he revealed to them, it was through no fault of his own.

And his patients too would come to find themselves in amongst the wooded clearing. The solitary hare surrounded only by plants becomes less alone the longer the viewer peruses the scene. Even in its supposed isolation, insects abound and prevent the hare from ever truly being alone. It only took time to see the true scene, as it would take his patients time to find their true selves.

He had been in the office when he first saw the man. All his appointments for the following week had been arranged and he had turned his attention back to the drawing of his old house which he was yet to complete. The intricate roofing tiles were not something that could be completed with half-attention so as soon as his gaze fell across the street, he placed the graphite down on the desk. Strained fingers ran through dark wayward curls. It was hard to

make out the man's face from the distance; it was laboured, a concentrated disdain moving between the laptop screen before him and out the window.

At a guess, the man worked from home. Took solace in the confines of the four walls and the space he had created for himself. The windows were his vestige to a life he had once had; once thought he wanted. But now as he looked down upon them, he knew he was different, knew that the crawling ants trudging in formation were nothing he could ever be. For now, Hannibal could only wonder at what the man peered with such a visceral contempt.

The man got up, skulked to the back of the room. It was hard to see with the way the windows caught the glint of the sun; slumping back in his seat, he swallowed something down without water. Aspirin perhaps; what ugly thoughts hammered at his mind and would not shut themselves out? Hannibal could help.

If the man provided him with nothing else, at least he would be allowed something interesting to look at and pass the time. An aesthetic view as he worked – it was no wonder the Greeks so lauded their sculptures, but it felt more appropriate that Hannibal should get to see the real thing. He wanted no fake imitation – only access to the Gods themselves.

It was coming up to 6.15. He was to dine at 8. It was time to get ready to leave. The aesthetic view would have to wait for his return.

Chapter 2

Will watched as his neighbour's car pulled out of the drive at 8 on the dot. From his website, Will had learned that Hannibal Lecter was his name. *Doctor* Hannibal Lecter.

After years of working in the ER, he had moved into the psychiatric field and taken up private practice. It was clear he was popular, acclaimed; he had an almost full schedule on the very first day he opened. His previous practice had been a three-hour drive from here; Doctor Lecter must be good at what he does if people are willing to go out of their way to seek his consort.

A prestigious list of medical journals under his belt; perhaps Alana would know him.

Will pulled out his phone; hesitation pulling at his digits as he typed. He did want to see Alana – he did. His interest was not solely that of learning more about the mysterious man next door.

Will

Hello, Alana. I hope you are well. When are you free? It would be great to catch up.

Alana

All the better for hearing from you! How about Friday in two weeks?

Will

Great. You decide the place and I'll be there.

It would be good to see Alana – all the latest times he had socialised were when Beverly turned up at his place uninvited and dragged him out to whatever *hot new club* had opened downtown. This usually resulted in Will nursing a whiskey at the bar while avoiding eye contact and watching Beverly find some new woman to grind against on the dance floor. It was not Will's scene by any means, but he was glad of the invite – and glad to make sure Beverly got home safely after the copious amounts of shots.

It wouldn't be Dr Lecter's scene from the looks of things either – a calendar full of high-society events and dinners, galas and receptions. Dr Lecter lived in a different world. Will had to wonder if the man slept at all. There were signs of life in the house across the way often as early as Will arose, and all these events saw him regularly out until after midnight.

Even on days when he had no events penned in, Will saw Hannibal come and go like the changing of the tide. No, Hannibal was not the changing of the tide – Hannibal was the force that pulled the tides this way and that; the world around him were the mere tides.

Will could not help but let his mind wander to the places that Hannibal Lecter went after dark. The dinners seemed a loathsome but necessary toll for a man of such esteem. Appearances must be kept. But the other places he went, the quiet houses, the wooded corners, or when he seemed to disappear altogether. That gleaming silver vehicle which seemed to stand out so well against the mundanity of the everyday would, when it wished, seemingly turn a corner and no longer be anywhere that Will could find it.

Hannibal was a handsome man; harsh features that come together to create a sculpted vision.

Will could imagine where Dr Lecter goes, what he does in his private moments, how so many would wish to touch greatness. Something stirred in his loins at the thought.

He was *not* jealous.

He didn't even know the man.

Will was in the car now. Couldn't quite remember when he had left. The dash said it was 9.17 pm. Pulling out his laptop, he perched it awkwardly between his lap and the steering wheel. Article-writing may be endlessly mundane, but it had its perks. Since working from home allowed him not to be forced into unwanted socialisation in a loud stuffy office. And he could work where he wanted; whether that be in the middle of some forest while the dogs circled around him or in the middle of the night in his car parked in some lot that he didn't know all that well.

He pulled out his camera from his bag and turned it towards the hall. There were stained glass panels across the top which seemed to glitter in the moonlight. It was beautiful; he lined up the shot and snapped away until he was happy with the result.

It wasn't weird. Or at least, he didn't care if it was. Who would see him at this time anyway?

And besides, he needed to get the dogs more food; only a few stores sold the brand that best agreed with all his pups. It was just down the street; *that's why he was here* .

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The event had been as frightfully uninteresting as Hannibal had expected it to be. He watched as flouncy dresses and puffed-out chests in ill-fitting suits vied to prove their worth amongst civilised folks.

The routine of socialisation was so familiar that it was akin to pushing the keys of a harpsichord; with each move he made he knew exactly what the outcome would be. He had hoped that the gala would at least provide a delight to the ears, but it seemed that some members of the brass section were lacking in skill. He ensured to get their business cards lest they dare play another unsightly tune.

He wandered over to the window; intent on admiring the befallen night and ignoring the wretched melody that was being played out. The hall's windows were vast and intricate arches that seem out of a place in what was otherwise an area of concrete and grey modernity; brutalism at its worst. Across the street, he watched as a dark-haired man lugging something into the trunk of his car. Quickly he shuffled back into the driver's seat, and Hannibal waited expectantly for the engine to splutter to life and light beams to pour out into the dusty night.

But neither came. The man sat in the car, unmoving. A small glow poured across his face; a screen in his lap. There was no intention to move from right where he was.

"Hannibal! Hannibal, darling."

His attentions were swiftly pulled away from the man in the car by a shrill, familiar voice. The warm smile returned to his face as he turned to meet her. As the orchestra played their latest tune, Hannibal readied himself to dance amongst the masses once again.

"Hannibal, how have you been?"

"Wonderful, Caroline, and yourself?"

"Oh, oh, you know how it is," she began. "The *divorce* is a right mess. But if he doesn't want me to tell the world what kind of a man he truly is, he will agree to my terms."

Hannibal did not *know how it was,* but he nodded cordially as she continued. The field of psychology had taught him well to listen or appear as if he was doing so.

"The poor woman he was with – when I tell you she was shocked to see me – he told her I was dead! That he was a poor widower and that the estate was his! *Please* , he wishes he had half of what I have."

When finally the woman seemed appeased with her spewing of information, she took no time in turning the conversation back to him. Gossip; the only currency that mattered amongst those who had all the money in the world. However, Hannibal had no intention of fuelling the economy with the particulars of his own life.

"How about you, Hannibal? No pretty young thing on your arm?"

"If someone interesting enough were to come along, of course, I might consider it. But I am a busy man."

"Only Hannibal Lecter could be *too busy* for love. How many have you had to bat away in your ploy to remain loveless? All those beautiful dinner parties, don't you want someone to

share with them?"

"Are you saying that *you* are not good enough company, Caroline?"

She giggled at that, that giggle which she had always given him no matter how humourless whatever it was he had said. The blush on her cheek was involuntary – she had been satiated enough to cease her prying.

Then came along another flock and Hannibal continued to nod and contributed as much as was necessary and expected. The inadequacy of the music had put a foul taste in his mouth. He could not be the first to leave neither the last; his eyes constantly flickered about the room.

Counting, watching, waiting.

His departure was a gentle stroll with a flurry of polite goodbyes following him – in his absence he would be missed.

The car in the lot across the street was gone; and when he returned home, his neighbour's car was parked in the road as it usually was. But no one was home; not even the veritable army of hounds that seemed to drag him down the street at all hours of the day. Hannibal had noticed that whenever his neighbour had to leave the dogs in the dark hours of the day, he would keep the lights on for them.

No lights were on now.

The dogs were probably dragging him halfway across town at this very moment.

His own house stood as imposing as ever; he had come to love the sight of his home against the meagre surroundings. As he strode up the steps, he noticed that by the side of his garbage can, some trash had been strewn out the side. It sat awkwardly between the can and the lid, and he swiftly moved to push it back inside. Presumably, some passer-by had used it for quick disposal. But as he went to push the trash back into the bin, he realised it was his own. The plastic wrap which he used to package fresh meat; some pest could perhaps be responsible, but he failed to see how this would be the only evidence of their intrusion.

He pushed the rubbish back into the trashcan and closed the lid.

***

Despite the chill that the evening allowed to creep into the air, Will was sweating. His pack were good dogs, but chasing after one in the middle of the night because the lead had snapped was never high up on the list of tasks he wished to carry out. He'd got Zoe back after a slight tussle with both her, the other dogs and the leads that had managed to wrap around his legs.

The one hand that held the six still-functioning leads was less preoccupied than the one which was currently carrying the pooch. Zoe seemed a little too pleased with the arrangement; he'd need to get a lead as soon as possible. His already-full hands fumbled until finally, they found his keys tucked away in the inside pocket of his jacket.

After a slight struggle, he managed to get them into the landing and usher them up the flights of stairs to get to his front door. Another few minutes of painful manoeuvring and he finally managed to get the pack up the stairs to his apartment door. As he went to push the key into hid front door, it moved.

It moved.

It was already open.

He quickly entered, expecting to see a ransacked apartment: but there was nothing. Despite how it might appear to the untrained eye, Will knew exactly where everything single thing in his apartment was. It wasn't always this disorganised, only when he was in the middle of an assignment at work...

He was always in the middle of an assignment at work.

It may appear that the fishing hooks dotted across every desk and table, the pile of clothes that moved between his desk chair and his bed intermittently, the dog toys strewn across the floor, were a misplaced mess. But that was not the case – Will knew the location of each. And not a thing had moved since he was last here.

He traipsed through the apartment, checking for any signs that might indicate a disturbance. His laptop sat undisturbed on the desk where he had left it. The safe in the closet undisturbed. Will didn't have much worth the trouble it would take in stealing it. Regardless, it seemed not a thing was out of place.

Except for the window.

The kitchen window which led to the fire exit had been left off the latch. If someone had so brazenly stepped in through the front door, why would they bother to exit through the window? They'd not taken a single misstep in their jaunt through his place; Will failed to conceive how they would then fail to close their exits behind them.

Unless... It was not a failing.

It was entirely intentional.

Whoever it was had meant Will to see this. They meant to make him mull their intentions over and over in his mind. He closed the window; there was nothing he could do about this apparent intruder now. It was getting late; it was time to see how many minutes of sleep he could manage tonight.

He pulled off his slacks and threw them atop the ever-growing mountain of clothes. His eyes fell to the outside world – or rather the inside world of the house across the street. Dr Lecter

was readying himself for bed. The curtains to his bedroom were not drawn; Will could not help but watch as he unbuttoned his shirt and shrugged it from his shoulders. The man's form impeccable; just as it seems everything in his life is.

Will's eyes couldn't help but linger over broad shoulders and pecs. Only when the man exited his view did he pull himself away. It was getting late; Will did not want to wake late tomorrow. Flopping against the bed like a dead fish, he closed his eyes and willed himself not to think of toned muscles, tanned skin, salt-and-pepper chest hair.

Chapter 3

“I can’t help myself but feel like you moved to run away from me,” Franklyn asked, the cool expression he was trying to convey missing its mark entirely.

Franklyn gave him patronage, and that was as far as any sort of benefit to Hannibal’s life extended. Considering, he was not in need of the money. Considering, he did this for enjoyment. Franklyn added no value to Hannibal’s existence by his sitting across from him in the leather chair, sobbing about the pitiful life he was forced to endure.

A slow and deliberate blink was the beginning of Hannibal’s reply to such a statement; he could have laughed and Franklyn would not have seen for his face was so buried in snotty tissues.

“The priorities of the world differ greatly from how you perceive them, Franklyn. The time it took me to find this new place, the effort of moving, the upheaval of my schedule for many weeks. If I cared so much about ridding myself of your presence, do you not think I would simply refer you to another psychiatrist and save myself the effort?” Hannibal posited.

The way Franklyn’s eyes shot up at the suggestion almost made Hannibal laugh; he had thought many times about the action. But, at present, it seemed not worth the snivelling he would be forced to endure on account of the way he knew it would be taken by Franklyn.

The buzzing of the fly as you attempt to go about your day is undoubtedly annoying, but once the fly has flown in the other direction you have little trouble forgetting it. One day, Hannibal might take a rolled-up newspaper to the insistent buzzing, but for now, he was content to waving his hand to keep it at arms’ length from him.

“Do you think there is something wrong with me, Dr Lecter?”

“ *Wrong* is a subjective term, Franklyn. It is not for me to say whether there is something wrong with you. It is for me to help you with what you wish to be helped with.”

“It is not obsessive behaviour, is it? All I want is to be friends.” Franklyn asked – less of a question and more a plea that Hannibal might reassure him otherwise. Hannibal had no intention of such a thing.

“The limit is created by the way you create the friendship – the boundaries they set out and whether or not you cross them,” Hannibal replied.

“How am I supposed to get to know someone if they don’t let me in?”

“Some people do not want to be *known* , Franklyn. You must find people in your life who wish to be known by you.”

“Why do you not want to be known by me, Hannibal?”

There it was – the question that always sat so boldly on Franklyn's lips but which seldom allowed itself to slip out. Questions were often left unasked when the most likely answer would do nothing but damage. Hannibal uncrossed his legs and crossed them again with the opposite leg on the top, he took a sip of his drink – he let the question marinate in the air for moments longer than it needed to, he watched as Franklyn squirmed.

A deep breath filled his lungs and then he continued.

"Because I am your psychiatrist, we are here to talk about you."

"I don't want to be just your patient. Can I not want to be more than that?"

Hannibal cocked his head; answering without answering. The same question had been posed a thousand times and Hannibal felt at this point there was no further room for rubbing salt into the wound. Franklyn was one big wound, and every time he stepped into his office, he was diving himself head-first into a salt mine.

"Our time is almost up, Franklyn, is there anything else you wish to discuss before we conclude."

Franklyn only shook his head; a small weary smile attempting to find a reprise in the doctor's dark eyes. The only offering he received was the clinical *caring* stare of a doctor, not the needed compassion of a friend.

Hannibal Lecter was not his friend.

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It was almost 10 pm.

Will had been so distracted by the barrage of emails and calls that he had missed Dr Lecter leaving. It was another dinner party, Will assumed. Between the calls from his boss to ensure that the article was going to get finished tonight – which only served to take time away from his writing of the article, Beverly trying to message him about the new woman in her life, and Alana *just wanting to check* that they were still on for next Friday, Will thought he was about to lose it. He had made his way back to the newest entirely mundane article which his boss seemed overly thrilled about having him write. An oil spill on the East Coast last week had caused catastrophic damage to the wildlife; hundreds of animals dead or poisoned, but Will had looked into the dealings of the company for the last ten years. Spates of animal deaths seemed to follow wherever they went and no one had yet put the pieces together. Faulty piping on faulty ships; God, he was going to wake up to so many emails.

His boss was as keenly excited as he was trepid. The pushback would be undoubted, but Will had taken every loophole necessary to ensure that all his information had been obtained legally. Or at least, created such a guise that no one could argue otherwise.

Had all of his means of collecting information been strictly legal? No.

Did he have enough evidence to fool a court otherwise? Yes.

As far as he was concerned, they were the same thing.

It was 10.57 pm when the piece was sent. He knew it was perfect and that his boss might not even look over it before sending it out.

Will had a headache. It wasn't his plan today to overdose on aspirin, and he'd already taken six in the last hour. The dogs needed a walk, and the streets had quieted to a comfortable evening hush. No one to try and fuss over the dogs, talk to him, see him. This was the perfect time of day.

Surely his headache could not get any worse than this.

The cool breeze attacked every inch of Will's skin which was left exposed to it. The thumping of his heart in his head was far louder than any of the strange noises of the night. It pounded against his brain with no reprise with only one thought following as he went.

A thought he refused to acknowledge.

He had been walking for a while; he could tell by the reddened imprints of dog leads that were strewn across his palm and fingers. But he had no idea how long he'd been walking or where they had gone. Too preoccupied with his own thoughts; he only noticed where he was when he realised found himself at the charcoal front steps of Dr Lecter's abode. It was a menacing building; its grandeur and style seemed almost out of place amongst the relative modernity of the rest of the neighbourhood. But that is why Will liked it. It felt no need to hide itself, to be demure or to conform.

Cold fingers played with the camera that hung from his neck. One hand did all it could to corral the tired, but still excitable, rabble of dogs before him, as the other hand attempted to pull the camera up to his face and look through the viewfinder. His hand shook uncontrollably; even tutting the dogs to still did little to help. The cold that was creeping in was thawing at his bones. Even if he had remembered to bring out his gloves, he'd have no means by which to get them on now.

He crossed the road; pulling himself and the dogs up the stairs and into his apartment. As he switched on the heater, the little dogs Buster and Ellie bounded over to it; wanting to take back all the warmth their little bodies had lost by being forced outside. Except for Zoe who was, as she always was, perched on the end of his bed making herself taller than all the big dogs. He sat down beside her, gently stroking her as his eyes drifted out to the night.

Even from his third-floor apartment, the house across the street did not diminish in its grandeur. The creeping empty rooms only faintly lit by the odd lamp; the imagined ghosts of all those Will had conjured to live there while it was vacant had not quite gone away. But one roamed the halls more confidently than all the rest. Even when Dr Lecter was gone, his presence lingered, loomed just as the house did.

Dull rectangles bore their eyes into him. All six windows peering into him more than he had ever been brave to peer into them. But he had to, he *needed* to.

He was down the flights of stairs and out of the apartment block before he knew what he was doing. The dark building grew closer and closer with every step. There was no one around. At this time of night, it was only him and the shadows that wandered the streets.

There he was before the front steps again. He could turn around – go home and go to bed and no one would ever know he was here.

But would he sleep? Would he really find peace when all he could think about was the man that resided here?

He pulled up his camera; his hands shaking less furiously now they were gloved and both free to steady his shot. Every time Will looked he saw another intricate detail, something that told the world, that told *him* , of how superior it was to every other building that sat here. It was beautiful. Will laboured in taking perfect shots; capturing the elegance of the trellis, the decoration of the trim, the way the paint had faded in its years from a brighter colour to this perfect smoke colour as if it had been designed to do just that. And perhaps it had.

The front steps enticed him, leading up to that green door. It was beckoning him. Calling him over without reprise. At the door he stopped; he shouldn't do this. His hand reached into his satchel and pulled out the lockpick. The *only* reason he had it was in case he locked himself out. Despite never having done it before, it was always best to be prepared for such a situation.

This was not that situation.

He knew he should not be doing this, but how could he help himself when it was right here before him like this. It was a simple enough process; he'd had a lot of practice. The pick slowly worked at the pins until the final one clicked. The doorknob twisted in his hand. With a final survey of the quiet street, Will headed inside.

***

Hannibal's fingers dug into the steering wheel as he spied the boy frantically leaving the wooden door to Hannibal's home. It was slammed shut and he was running across the street. His ministrations were clear, a hand running through his hair, wild eyes scanning to see if the world had witnessed his misgivings. Only Hannibal had, and as he watched the little deer skitter home, he could not help but wonder what he had witnessed. Will Graham's antics had certainly been enjoyable to watch from afar, but he had thought eventually the game would be up. His insistent snooping was not intended for front-page news, Hannibal would make sure of that.

It would not be so hard to make him disappear; a social circle smaller than most and a myriad of undiagnosed mental disorders which would eventually be blamed for his sudden disappearance. No real connection to the man who lived across the way; no one would look in basements or barns that they did not know existed.

He seemed strong enough; you had to be with dogs like that and a penchant for fixing things, but he was not as astute as he believed himself to be. If he were, he might have noticed that Hannibal had parked his car in just the spot that the streetlights didn't meet. That even if you noticed the car's silhouette, it would be almost impossible to see who sat inside.

Something burned in Hannibal as he sat watching Will's crisis unfold through the apartment windows above. Such a beautiful dance playing out in his head expressed in fevered pacing between rooms and calloused hands rubbing against his face.

It was not something that Will had seen which had caused him to react like this.

No , it was what he had done and what he was doing that was causing the man these demons. A wry grin had Hannibal's teeth poking from beneath his lips. Perhaps he was even more interesting than Hannibal had expected. Perhaps he should let the boy get to know him a little better.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Perfectly curled black locks flowed down and sat neatly over Alana's left shoulder. Will was more than happy to watch and listen as Alana spoke. She was a vision as ever. When they had dated her tastes had been a little more demure; she might get mistaken for an English teacher or a librarian. Will only meant that with great praise, but recently a new style had taken a hold of her. Money and opportunity made her radiant. As much as she would complain about how she *could not get Margot to stop spoiling her with gifts* , the way her fingers lovingly teased at the shirt button as she talked told Will her complaints were little more than an afterthought.

"I am so glad we are finally doing this again, Will. Oh, and Margot sends her love."

"How is she? Managing the Verger Estate alright?" Will asked.

"Well, far better than her brother ever did. But you didn't hear that from me, "Alana grinned.

Will only playfully shook his head and took another bite of the pasta he had ordered. It was good; nothing more than glorified mac-and-cheese at triple the price. But his stomach was filled with roaring anxiety that never quite let his appetite return.

All he could think of was the night before, of how it had felt to cross the threshold of Dr Lecter's home. Of the soft silk scarves, of the faint smell of cologne that lingered on his coats, of the painted hare that had stared at him unendingly. The snap of his camera as he had taken photo after photo of the small entryway that had brought him a step closer to the good doctor. He'd been a fool, but he could not decide whether it was the fact that he had entered the man's house at all or the fact that he had been too chicken to go any further than the entryway that made him feel so inadequate.

He needed to stop thinking about the man.

"Is *he* still doing okay?" Will fumbled it out between mouthfuls and instantly regretted it.

Talking about *him* was the worst distraction that he could have possibly thought of.

"Will," She waited patiently until he met her gaze. "You know I have nothing to say to you about him, but he is doing as well as one can expect to given his *circumstances."*

An awkward nod was all he could manage. They both knew that he knew better than to ask. Alana wasn't going to talk about him.

The chatter of the surrounding people; the music playing too quietly to actually listen to and too loudly to block out; the chattering of teeth with every bite the pair took all worked to

amplify the awkward silence which had settled between them.

“Do you know Hannibal Lecter?”

As the words left his mouth, he regretted it. Again.

No prefacing, no slow-build up. He was trying to play it cool, and this was not how to do it. The creases in Alana’s brow were growing; he smiled as sincerely as he could and they softened. A little.

“I do. Do you?” Alana asked, failing to hide the way her eyes narrowed.

Will took a breath, quiet and considered but as nonchalant as he could make it. He didn’t meet Alana’s eyes; the least suspicious thing he could think to do.

“Oh, he just moved in across the street, I saw an ad for his website and wondered if you might run in the same circles.”

“God, what a small world!” Alana’s face finally fell away from suspicion, and Will felt his shoulders ease their tension. “I could ask him about therapy if you are –”

“No,” Will huffed. “No, thank you, Alana. I don’t want to be psychoanalysed by my neighbour.”

“Fine,” She replied, quick to move on from the awkward topic. “He’s originally from Lithuania. Used to work in the ER. He mentored me at Johns Hopkins. He is amazing at what he does.”

Will merely nodded; of course he was. It seemed like Hannibal could do no wrong. Despite seeming to know Hannibal personally, what she knew of him seemed to be impersonal at best. Or at least what she was telling him. He wanted to ask if they were friends, more than friends; if she had noticed the unbearable handsomeness of his face.

But he said nothing.

“He’s actually the one doing the lecture this evening,” Alana chimed, a glint in her eye.

“Oh,” Will feigned surprised as well as he could. “What a coincidence.”

Alana was sipping her glass of water; *the only downside to carrying the little one* , she had said. Will very much doubted it was the *only* downside, but he understood her meaning well enough. As she turned her wrist to check the time, the whites of her eyes seemed to double in size.

“God, is that the time already?”

It was coming up to 6 pm. The aforementioned lecture on *Socially Exclusive Behaviours* began at 7. Alana took a few more quick, dutiful bites of her meal; there was hardly any left, she had enjoyed it much more than Will had.

“Why don’t you come with me, Will? I’m sure I could pull a few strings and get you in without a ticket,” She said, raising an eyebrow. “I don’t doubt you would find it very interesting.”

Will merely shook his head with a small smile. The lecture’s topic seemed to be the very reason she was inviting him; he wondered if perhaps this had been the play all along. Get him out to dinner and drag him along in the hopes that he could see the error of his ways and suddenly become the man she had always wanted him to be rather than the man that he was. He knew he was being irrational – *he had been the one to ask her to catch up* – but sometimes he could see it. She’d let her eyes wander for a moment too long, and just as she became transfixed in a daydream the sadness and the pity would reveal themselves again.

Maybe the lecture would be interesting, but Will had no intention of sitting in a room surrounded by shrinks who would all take great pleasure in dissecting his brain and picking apart every malformity.

But he was not avoiding it because of that.

He was avoiding it because the guest speaker was his neighbour. Doctor Lecter. And he could not bear the thought of sitting in amongst the audience and being nothing more than a pair of beady onlooking eyes. Dr Lecter would be performing to the crowd; Will couldn’t bear to watch the man spread his attention so thin.

If he were to be before the doctor, he wanted it to be in a moment he could have him to himself.

“It was so lovely to see you again, Will. We have to do it more often,” Alana waved for the cheque and began pulling her coat over her shoulders.

It was what she always said, and rarely did the frequency of their meetings ever get any better. Yet again, it seemed like just one of those things that people said.

The cheque came; Alana took it and paid before Will even had a chance to look at how much their meal had cost them. He suddenly felt guilty for having had two whiskeys. Alana’s soft lips pecked at his cheeks, and with a bright smile she rushed off.

When they had been together Alana’s ever-rising position at the BSHCI had slowly eaten away at her time and it had eaten away at her ability to ignore the things that concerned her about Will. He had liked her; he had really liked her. But it was not all-consuming. It was not the light in Alana’s eyes as she recalled some little uninteresting things that Margot had done. It was not butterflies leaping and dive-bombing in the pit of his stomach. It was not the burning desire he felt every time he even thought about Dr Lecter.

***

The *Guest Lecture on Socially Exclusive Behaviours* did not conclude until 9 pm. Unlike the other times when Hannibal had been at dinner parties or galas or the *other things* it was likely he did at such hours of the night, there was no chance he might just bore of his surroundings and return home earlier than expected. As the lock clicked open and Will

stepped into Hannibal's abode once again, he felt a sudden confidence. Will could take his time unlike he had the last time he was here.

None of the doors that led from the front hall had been open when he last came, but today a single door sat ajar. It was as if it was beckoning Will in. Past the door was a small staircase, which he climbed in earnest. It was unlike anything he'd ever seen as he tentatively pushed at the wooden door; all perfect gleaming surfaces, not a single thing out of place. The greys and whites of the kitchen were cold, unemotive, dangerous.

Unlike the house's luxurious exterior, the kitchen felt no need to lure. If you had made it this far the luring had already been done. If you had made it this far, it was too late.

Will rang a gloved finger along the marble island; this was not the Hannibal who Will knew. This was another face of his. Will had watched him work through the window; had seen the soul and conviction that the man poured into his cooking. This was clinical and uncaring; Hannibal was clinical in the medical sense; in the sense, he was precise and unfailingly accurate, but this was not that.

As his mind wandered, so did his eyes until they landed upon the large silver refrigerator that loomed over him. The man had impeccable taste; Will wondered if he had been a chef in a past life. He had looked and looked and there was nothing online to suggest that he had. But it seemed he was just a man of unending talents.

The refrigerator came open with a gentle tug; there was not much inside. Hannibal was a fresh ingredients kind of man. There were four plastic packages; three containing liver and the fourth containing a pair of lungs. Will's father had taught him to fish before he had taught him to walk; the grim reality of meat and flesh did little to dispel him. He wasn't quite sure what possessed him too, but he grabbed out one of the packets of liver and stuffed it into his satchel. As he went to swing closed the door, he saw the bottles of wine lined up on the inner shelf. Hannibal always drank with wine; if only he could ask which paired the best with the meat.

The little mahogany box sat on the island, as gloved fingers flipped through the stack of recipe cards searching for something, anything that had the word 'liver' written on it. He wasn't even sure what animal the liver had belonged; but he doubted it mattered all that much, his version was hardly going to live up to whatever Hannibal would have produced.

A snap of the camera and he placed the recipe card exactly as he had found it and closed the box. Then he took more photos; of the knife block, of the strange art hung on the walls, of the way the marble glistened at a certain angle, of the cookery books in many different languages which sat on the shelf. Imagining exactly where he would paste them into his collection.

He took a deep breath, and let the camera drop against his chest.

Then he was done; he needed to be done. He had lingered here far too long.

The sympathetic concern that radiated from Alana, the questioning worry in Beverley's voice, the shock and the fear that clawed at him when he thought too long about the things he did came flooding in. It was his cue to leave. His breath was stuttering as he raced back

through the hall, only slowing as he peered carefully out of the front door. The darkness would shield him well, but the possibility of being seen was much higher at this earlier hour of the day. He liked living here – *he liked his neighbour* , he was unwilling to let himself be the ruining cause, again.

His pace across the street was as nonchalant as he could make it; his best attempt at a man not fleeing the scene. Only when his own front door was bolted behind him, the dogs jumping at his feet did he feel his heart rate begin to lessen.

***

Hannibal was glad to reach home, glad to find himself away from inane questions and niceties. What he was most glad of though was the smell as he walked through the door; cheap aftershave, animals, sweat. It had been unmistakeable when the intruder had last come calling; musky and alcoholic as it sullied the gentler smell he had left on the garments that occupied his coat rack. As he stepped through the entrance and towards the kitchen door, the smell did not dissipate.

How simple a trick it was to open a door and see whether it might tempt someone through.

Will should know better than to fall into such a blatant trap; Hannibal would teach him in time.

Nothing seemed particularly out of place, only that unmissable aroma that assaulted his nose wherever he stepped. Since the first moment Will's wandering gaze had been caught, Hannibal had been fascinated. Perhaps it was a mere thrill, but as his neighbour worked his way closer and closer Hannibal could not stop himself from fantasising. Something drew Will to him; something drew them together. Hannibal was not sure whether he wanted to tighten his grip upon that very force and ensure they could never be apart or sever the very flesh that pulled them closer and watch as the boy floundered in the mess he had made.

Firm hands ran across the marble surfaces, wondering what he had done when he had been here, whether he had been quick and fevered in his actions or taken a languid pace in order to take in everything he wished to see. Never without his camera, Hannibal wondered what artefacts Will would see fit to capture. What was worthy of immortalisation in the eyes of Will Graham?

His eyes gravitated to the refrigerator; had Will been so brave as to open this door himself? As he pulled it open and noticed the absent package, he let the corners of his mouth curl to a pleased smile.

"Oh, Will, what fun we are going to have."

Chapter End Notes

This really is just me being like "How can I make these gay mfs unbearably horny for each other in creepy ways"? Huh

follow my twitter @accideadly if you like, I don't post shit lmao

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will could not tear his eyes away from the sight across the street. He and the doctor were both cooking their meals. Tandoori liver was not his usual affair. He was no stranger to spice, usually he was just too lazy to make the effort and resorted to whatever store-bought thing at the back of his freezer had the shortest cooking time. But today he was taking all efforts, equalling that of Hannibal Lecter as he watched him work wonders in the kitchen.

Or at least, screwing his eyes to watch and copy as the man across the way laboured in an effort Will could only attempt to match.

He had bought all the ingredients that the recipe card had listed – his bank account was likely screaming for it. But he wanted to do no wrong. He wanted to taste what the doctor would taste.

The liver had soaked in milk for 4 hours. It had been an ordeal to slice the liver neatly with the basic knives that he had and he knew his presentation would have nothing on that which prettied the plate across the road. He had mixed the marmalade and lemon juice and was now sautéing the pork belly in tandem with the doctor. As soon as Dr Lecter removed the pan from the heat and placed it into the oven, Will did too.

Trying to remain in step with a tv chef was troubling enough, but this – watching a man on the other side of the street who was much more practised and nimbler – was as hard as you might expect. Will was determined; he hadn't gone to so much effort only to mess it up.

The liver drained he coated it in paprika as just as Dr Lecter did. The sizzling meat produced a strong aroma that had Will drooling; he realised he had been so consumed with ingredient procuring that he had failed to eat all day. This meal would be all the more special.

Once all the slices of liver had been cooked, he piled the utensils in the sink to worry about later. With what he hoped would be an artful flick of the wrist, the remaining marmalade glaze dropped unceremoniously down on top of the liver and pork belly on the plate.

The wine he had taken – the wine he had *stolen* - sat in the refrigerator begging to be tasted. Blush coloured his cheeks and Will wished he could name it as guilt or shame. It was neither. It was *something* at the prospect that he was just about to eat and drink delicacies from Dr Lecter's own collection.

Before he could think more about it, he grabbed the bottle from the fridge and poured a large serving into the fanciest glass he owned. It was not that fancy – and was the only survivor of what had once been a set of 4 which Alana had bought him one Christmas.

Plate in front of him and view of the dining table across the way, Will sat down to enjoy his meal.

Will let the wine wet his pink lips; savouring the hearty flavour and the sweet aroma. As his eyelids fell closed, he imagined Dr Lecter sat across from him. This meal shared between them and only them. Every step he took drew them closer together, but when would Hannibal see him? When would Hannibal recognise all that Will was doing for him, because of him? The man must understand the magnetism of his very being. The absurd feeling that no matter how close he got it was not close enough.

He was still across the way; not nearly close enough, but Will took great pleasure in matching his pace. With each mouthful he took, Will followed along. It was hard to see from so far away, but he could imagine the doctor's soft lips parted, the pleasant hums leaving him as he basked in the masterpiece he had created.

The taste on Will's own tongue only paled to what his neighbour must be experiencing. And he needed to know that experience as his own. Perhaps he would offer Will a mouthful of from his own plate and let him relish how the meal was *supposed to taste* . The cold end of Hannibal's fork would enter his mouth and he would taste, *feel* , all the hours of work the man's deft hands had poured into his loving creation.

His fingers might brush softly at Will's jaw as he watched him swallowing it down, watching with dark eyes as each muscle's incremental movements showed signs of approval. And Will would let every muscle work to praise the man's work. He would show him exactly how he felt. He would show him it was beautiful.

***

As Hannibal ate, he perused his tablet. Normally he would want to think of nothing of the meal, but his recent *finds* had him more enraptured than he had ever been. Words and taste came together to share the most beautiful meal with his neighbour across the road.

From what he was able to observe, Will's preparation of the dish was haphazard at best. It wasn't that he was not a capable cook, but rather he took less precision in his movements. The tools he used were mediocre at best; kitchen knives that were hardly sharp enough at point of purchase, old pans aged and scratched in ways that did nothing to add to the flavour. The food would taste fine; it would not be horrific, but neither would it be the meal that the boy deserved to be given.

Hannibal mused what it would be for Will to sit at his table – to have no need of providing sustenance for himself ever again. Every meal could be one which he and Hannibal shared together – the efforts of Hannibal's labour sitting on Will's tongue, being digested and absorbed by Will's body.

Will had little time for fishing, but Hannibal had learned how he liked it. From the inside of his apartment, you might never guess how centrally he lived within the city. There were plentiful lakes and Hannibal would take Will to them all. Every possible destination – every possible opportunity for Hannibal to prepare a hunt of Will's own.

Oh, how he imagined they would hunt together.

Perhaps Hannibal should make it happen if it is the last thing he is to do.

As he placed another piece of meat between parted lips and began to chew, he found him unable to look at anything but the boy across the way. *His boy* . This form of attachment had just been beginning to grate on Hannibal when he had stumbled across certain unpublished articles tucked away on Will's hard drive – when he had realised just the kind of person Will Graham was.

The papers written by the press – even the most salacious and vile of organisations – tended to leave out a few of the most heinous details. But Will? Oh, how thorough Will was in his detailing of such events. How well he seemed to understand not only the how, but the *why* too. In some of the paragraphs, it seemed as if Hannibal himself were the one writing. Hannibal wanted nothing more than to root around in that beautiful brain; to see and *feel* the wiring, to touch and take and learn all that he could.

If he could, and he wanted to so he was to ensure it would happen, he would sit and listen to those musings and ramblings for all eternity.

What was so obviously beautiful and so obviously perfect in his embodied aesthetics was nothing more than a pale comparison of that which festered between perfect blue eyes. If anything, it felt like euphoria when Hannibal had realised his boy had such similar tastes tucked only a few layers beneath the exterior. It would be Hannibal who would show him the right way. It would be Hannibal who would help Will to realise just who he was. There was no limit to how far out he could coax him given time – and when Will realised just how perfect Hannibal was for him, they would be inseparable. Hannibal would make sure of it.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the short break, I was procrastinating writing the cooking scene because it is my least favourite to write :{ This chapter is a little shorter because there is no dialogue, but next chapter should be back into it!

I used this recipe as inspiration:
https://drlectersoffice.tumblr.com/post/81671187559/tandoori-liver-recipe-by-janice-poon-a-spicy

I hope you are enjoying, sorry I have not replied to many comments but I hope you know how much I appreciate all of your support and kudos!

Chapter 6

H is thief should have taken the Chateauneuf du Pape. Hannibal felt more incredulous about that than anything else. The Bordeaux worked well enough for red meats, but it was not designed to pair with the richer flavours that the tandoori spices had bought out. It was a shame; he was certain they had enjoyed their meal, but even when they were not seated at his table, he felt obliged to provide them with the best experience.

Amongst the luxurious rows of expensive wines, Hannibal found the Bordeaux he was looking for. Usually, he had these things imported, never letting his stock diminish, but his order would not arrive for another week – and an uninvited guest had ruined his stock-taking. For now, he would have to settle for store-bought.

The specialist store had all variety of things; meats and cheeses, wines and spirits, but Hannibal's fridge was well-stocked. In the move, some cutlery had been misplaced. The sweet owner's tongue had not taken long to waggle; to give up the suspected offender's location. Hannibal had found the knives and the silverware shoved in a measly drawer of the boy's apartment; he had not wanted to take them back after they had been so rudely tarnished, but they did well enough to slice his tongue and flay him.

The Chroma Type 301s were the best knives he had ever used. Such a wonderfully sharp blade that made flesh seem like paper, cartilage seemed like butter. He was not a butcher; slaughterer a more appropriate word. But Ripper worked well enough.

He picked up the various types of knives which he needed and headed to the checkout.

***

The leads which Will followed for his stories were best when he could follow them from the comfort of his apartment. Out he'd wandered to the other side of town just to be stood up; he didn't care. The next time someone told him that the lead was so important he *had to meet them in person* , he would tell them what he really thought about their precious intel. Pulling up quickly, it would be even too nice to call his parking crooked. But he didn't care, he had been out too long.

The Bentley was still up on the drive; so perfect and shimmering as if it was immune to all outside influences. It was in that shiny bubble that was Dr Lecter's life; a life that Will felt he knew so well after all this time. It was almost a month since that first day when the man across from him had appeared and Will had not yet approached. It was too soon, too risky; there was more he must learn before that.

With crumpled files spilling from his satchel, he slammed the car door with his hip and made his way towards the front door. The air was enough to flick his curls across his forehead; threatening to poke underneath his glasses at his eyes. But it was not enough to send the papers flying. *Thank God,* Will was not in the mood for chasing them down the street.

As he awkwardly fumbled amidst his bag for the keys, his shoe hit a package that had been left at the foot of the door. A little bigger than a shoebox, the box was a forest green colour tied with a black ribbon accented with grey pinstripes. There was a name tag, too. Had it really just been left out on the street for anyone to take? He knelt; eager to see what the label said.

Will.

That was all it said. The beating of Will's heart was not of surprise, he realised, but of fear and excitement. Who had sent him such a thing?

He lumbered the box and his bag into the apartment; trying not to be knocked over by the barking rabble eager to greet him. His bag was discarded somewhere on the floor as he headed to the kitchen counter; there was nothing of worth in his notes anyway.

He placed down the box with the gentle respect it deserved.

The beautiful emerald thing that had been wrapped just for him. Making the meek surroundings of his home seem meagre and lacklustre in comparison.

There was trepidation in his stuttering fingers; once he had opened the box all the surprises would be done. It had been a long time since someone had surprised Will. Usually, he did not like it, but today his heart and mind were in tandem with a different tune.

Thrill .

The thick card lid came up easily as he pulled it. As he placed it down on the table, the midnight black inner was revealed. Within in; a bottle of Chateauneuf du Pape and a smaller box wrapped in paper of the same dark shade. Sharp sensations prickled at Will's skin; he felt sweat forming at the base of his neck and across his forehead. The pit of his stomach was churning at the stupid thoughts that were starting to swirl in his head.

No one was buying things for him.

No one was buying *ridiculously expensive* gifts for Will Graham.

The paper had been sealed not with tape but with a wax seal; forest green with an embossed pattern that seemed somewhat familiar to Will. Pushing his thumbnail under it, he was careful not to damage it as he picked it from the paper. Beneath the paper, the box was also black but with grey stripes just like the nametag. With care not to damage the paper, Will removed the box and set it down on the counter.

The final gift.

He did not pause as he pulled the lid away.

Inside atop crushed velvet sat a knife.

A very specific knife.

One which he had seen in Hannibal's kitchen. One which Will had watched Hannibal wield in his tanned, veiny hands with such certainty; such awareness of his own skills and how to harness them.

Such a blade seemed not made for the hands of Will Graham.

A sinking spiral struck; like a single harsh word that lingers until there is nothing left of the person to whom it was uttered. Will had let his thoughts carry him away; no one but he could be responsible for this purchase. It would not be the first time that he had impulse-bought something in the hopes that the object itself would be the thing to fix all his problems. This was probably more expensive than all the fishing rods and the artesian beer and the eyeliner put together.

But it was not uncharacteristic.

And at least a knife had its uses.

The blade in his hand was weighty and foreign; made for more refined fingers than those on his calloused hands. But as he turned it in his grip, he could see the appeal. Especially for a man like Hannibal for whom cooking was an art; an all-encompassing experience; a show for only him.

And for Will; well, Will got to experience the show from afar. But now, now he could hold the hilt in his hand and experience what Hannibal did. One day he would ask the man how best to wield the thing; his deft fingers would fold around Will's own as he positioned them perfectly above the fresh joint of meat. His firm forearm would flex as he bared down his weight to move Will to the perfect position. Hannibal would make him practice until it was perfect.

Did Will really buy it?

He had Googled the brand on his return from the house; pure curiosity. The prices had stopped him from even entertaining the thought. His bills were already reduced enough thanks to his ex-girlfriend's wife; it would be beyond embarrassing to have to ask Margot for extra time to make the payments.

He was certain that he had closed the tab, gone to sleep and forgotten about it. Yet here it was, so he must have. He must have... But never before had he forgotten one of his compulsive purchases. Usually, he was so eager for it to arrive, so nervous about what the package might bring for him, that he didn't sleep until it was in his clutches.

He wouldn't just pass out and forget about it.

He knew he wouldn't.

Then just like that, two hours had passed; too many glasses of whiskey, a pounding head and a laptop that was struggling to cope with the weight of all the tabs which Will had opened.

Every avenue had been checked with a fine-tooth comb; his bank statements, the bank statements of people whose passwords he happened to be in possession of, dormant accounts he had used for work over the years, the untraceable accounts for dealings on parts of the internet it may leave you red-faced to be caught on.

And then checked again. And again.

All brought up nothing; no indication of dropping over $200 for a ridiculous knife which he had no purpose for.

Despite all the evidence pointing to him not having bought it, he knew it had to be him. Who would buy him such a gift? And without a note... It was unlike *his other friend* to be anything less than forthcoming; ensuring his name was stamped in bold and underlined for all the world, which he had believed only included himself and Will to see. And besides Alana would not have signed off on such a purchase from within the confines which he was now kept.

He was having to wrack his brains for anyone who would be willing to drop such an amount on him and he was coming up empty. Margot; had the money but no reason to buy him a gift. Beverly; probably didn't have the money and if she did, she probably would have burned all his clothes and brought him an entirely new wardrobe. Alana; probably wouldn't buy him too-sharp a pencil let alone a knife that was designed for nothing other than slicing with ease.

No one else would have bought him the gift. It had to be him. He had to have bought him for himself. But where was the missing money from his account? Where was the receipt? Where was the shipping label on the box that would have got it to him?

They were questions he couldn't dwell on any longer. He downed the last two fingers of whiskey in his glass and shut the laptop resolutely. With slightly unsteady hands, he fumbled for the camera in his bag. The pictures would likely come out blurry and unusable, but in place of a pair of binoculars, this would do. The form across from him had taken his rest earlier than usual; not that there was any 'usual' regarding the schedule which kept Hannibal out at all hours of the night. But he was catching an early flight tomorrow and even he was human.

When Will awoke tomorrow, he knew the man would already be gone. The 5.27 flight to Atlanta would already be on its way. There would be no one making breakfast across from him, no one labouring over in the study, no one to watch and to see.

Through the viewfinder, he watched the gentle swell of Hannibal's chest with each steady breath. He was content to sit here all night; keeping watch on Hannibal until he left for his travels. There was a heat, an ache – *something* which Will refused to label as anger – at the thought of Hannibal so far away.

But he knew he would return. The conference was only three days. Hannibal would always return to him.

Chapter 7

It was only the first day of a three-day conference which saw the gentle presence across the street quiet to nothingness – no man to watch cook; no seeing his concentrated form as he sketched; no sharp profile of his face as he sat across from a patient. Waking up to remember the man's current absence felt like a heavy weight dropped upon his chest; one which would not leave until his return. If it weren't for Hannibal leaving him, he would have been sat at his desk as he always was. Instead, he was sat across from Beverly at one of the high tables of her favourite seedy gay bar.

Beverly was back at the bar; it was a Friday night and yet somehow it only took her ten minutes each time to bring back whatever new painfully sweet cocktail she had decided on. She had insisted on paying; her newest promotion was serving her well and therefore Will made no complaints about the fruity drinks which she kept handing his way. The alcohol, he had thought, would take his mind away from the doctor. It turns out he could not have been more wrong.

Whenever Will blinked, the backs of his eyelids became the windows of the doctor's house. Peering at him even now.

When he dared to open them again, his eyes would quickly be drawn back over the scene before him. Chests and hips and arms and necks swaying, gyrating, twisting amongst each other the dance floor. Will wet his lips as he watched a couple's hands wandering across the bare flesh which their outfits revealed so plentifully. His mind could not help but wander to sights that were sorely missed.

"You aren't even listening, are you? Will, you are a lousy date," Beverly said with a cackle.

"I... I was listening," Will fixed his eyes on the highlight she had brushed liberally across her cheeks. He watched as they rose; a smirk overtaking her.

"Go on then, Graham," Beverly teased, "How's my next date sound?"

Will pressed his fingers against his temples; pretending he was massaging out an ache rather than trying to bide himself time.

"I think they sound great, Bev... As long as you are happy."

It wasn't just a laugh, but a roar that left Bev's red-tinted lips. Her head threw back, making a show of her amusement. The little yellow cocktail umbrella was quickly pelted in his direction; hitting gently against his cheek before it plummeted to the darkness below.

"Oh, Will..." She giggled, plucking the pink umbrella from his own drink and placing it neatly behind his ear. "Will Graham, how you ever scam those bigwigs out of information I will never know! You are a useless liar."

His lips turned to a straight line; he wasn't going to dig this hole any deeper. It was what he liked about Beverly, actually; she didn't tiptoe about him like he was a trap waiting to go off. Maybe working in criminal science made her immune to the more boring eccentricities, but Will wasn't complaining. He never got sorrowful pity out of Beverly Katz.

"And you don't even know how glaringly obvious a lie it is," She howled. "That's what it is so funny!"

"Fine... I wasn't listening at the exact moment you told me who your date was so– Tell me again."

"Oh, but should I just make you wait and suffer before I reveal it?" The corners of her lips pulled up mischievously.

"I'll hack your phone and find out, Bev, don't test me."

"That might have worked in school, but the FBI might have something to say about it," She retorted with a wink. "They don't take kindly to cyberattacks on their employees."

"Technically, it's not a cyberattack -"

"I was being facetious, you idiot. Anyway... Why should I tell you about my *endeavours* when you are so clearly hiding something from me?"

The colour and the warmth drained from Will's face like a drink knocked unceremoniously from the bar. He felt his hands clam, his throat growing drier by the second. The drink in his hand did little to quench his thirst, but he downed it anyway. He was glad the lights were dim and that the dusting of blush across his face might do well to hide his pallor.

"I don't know what you are talking about," He argued, vainly. Bev was already on to him, and they both knew it.

Her head turned, wandering into the crowd to look at what Will had been admiring. Too many moving bodies and painted faces, far too much bare flesh to narrow down what Will's eyes were moving upon so lovingly. But despite the fact his eyes were turned in the direction of the scantily-clad dancefloor, none of the bodies he could see were the one he sought. The one who had painted itself across the back of his eyelids.

A swift punch on the arm brought him back to reality.

"Wait, you aren't thinking about getting back with-" Beverly shouted.

"God... No! I told you, I told Alana I wouldn't... Well, she made me promise... He's in the damn BSHCI; how would that even work?"

"I don't know I bet Alana could arrange some conjugal visits," She cackled, but then placed a soft hand upon Will's stubbled face and met him with a soft smile.

"It's not *him* ! For one, Alana would kill me. For two, *you* would kill me," Will sighed and rested his hand on top of Beverly's. "Let's be honest, *he* would probably kill me."

“Atta boy,” she chimed, tapping on his knee before jumping out of the seat. “Show me your moves, it’s been so long.”

Despite the grumpy lull that settled on Will’s face, he still jumped up.

“Also, he and I were never technically together,” Will shouted, as Beverly pulled him onto the dance floor.”

“Yes, and I am the most monogamous person you’ve ever met! And pigs have learnt to fly!” Beverly shouted.

“Hey,” Will said, attempting to change the subject. “You still haven’t told me about your date.”

“I don’t want to spoil your night,” She said pulling him through the sweaty crowd to her favourite spot in the middle of the dance floor. “ *Trust me,* you don’t want me to spoil your night.”

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It must have been coming up to 4 am as Will wandered down the road; his eyes remaining down and unconcerned with the rest of the night. Bev was home safely and after twenty-five minutes of failed attempts to convince him to sleep on the couch, Will had headed for home. The dogs had been the perfect excuse... Well, it wasn’t really an *excuse* , he didn’t want to leave the dogs alone overnight.

But it had not been the only reason.

Across the street, the empty abode was even more monochromatic in this light. Forest green seemed pitch black. Dark voids encapsulating the snippets of the inside which they surrounded. With no lights on, the ghostly insides were almost imperceivable. But Will knew them well; for so long he had peered through those window panes and imagined himself the guest of honour in Hannibal’s home.

It wasn’t because he was missing the man, or because he was scared of bumping into the man, but Will in his slightly tipsy state decided now was as good as ever. Empty blackness would shield him well; no one would disturb his pursuit at this hour.

He crossed the street quickly; taking no precaution to check the road before he did. He pulled the lockpick from his bag; it was only in there in case he or Beverly locked themselves out, he had brought it out with him for *no other reason* . The door was familiar to him now, and growing ever easier to manoeuvre. It clicked open and he walked inside without looking back.

The entrance; the kitchen; what was the next step to be?

As he made his way up the steps to the second floor, his eyes lingered on the study door. Creeping forward through the dark, he peered in through the crack; surveying eyes waiting for what might befall him. The desk at which Hannibal usually sat was devoid of life without his presence; Will felt himself wander across the wooden floor, too hazy from the alcohol and too set on his task to even consider turning back.

As he took his place in the man's seat, his eyes were transfixed upon the building across the way. Finally seeing what the doctor saw as he worked away at this desk; finally seeing what Hannibal saw of *him* . In the darkness, the pale moonlight and the streetlamps only did so much to help Will imagine what Hannibal might see through the windows. On his bed, one of the dogs was curled in a sleeping heap. His pulse quickened at the thought that if the dogs were so easy to see, *he must be too* . And that from the top floor of Hannibal's house – from Hannibal's bedroom window – he must be all the more obvious. His skin crawled with something that he could not decipher; exhilarating fear, overcoming joy, nervous anticipation all worked as one.

With closed eyes, he imagined the sight of himself. Imagined himself sat at his desk, furiously typing to reach the next deadline. Imagined himself stood making the dogs' food and playing with them. Imagined himself on the bed in nothing but a thin t-shirt and boxers; imagined himself in less. Did Hannibal's eyes wander towards him as his did towards Hannibal? Such sights must be hard to ignore when presented so frequently.

With such a thought, he quickly crossed the way and up the stairs that made it to Hannibal's bedroom door. It was pushed up but not closed. One focused breath and Will headed in.

He looked at his dark reflection in the mirror on Hannibal's wardrobe; it was as if he was not looking at himself at all, merely an incomplete imitation. There was a piece of himself missing even now; he looked back to the dim light flooding out from his windows across the way. The missing piece was not there.

The missing piece was miles away.

Determined steps strode towards the wardrobe and a firm hand opened the door. The weak lighting that the street lamps were providing did little to reveal the veritable armoury which was concealed within. The ornate patterns and the decadent colours and the lavish materials. All made up the markers of the *Doctor Hannibal Lecter* who presented himself to the world. Will knew him better than that simple façade.

Out he pulled what appeared to be a salmon shirt with a simple pinstripe stitching running through it. It was not something too ostentatious, or too overt. It was demure in its beauty. Holding it against his front, he swung closed the wardrobe door and look at himself in the mirror. The man's shoulders were a little broader than his, a more well-filled chest, but nonetheless, it could work. It didn't smell much of Hannibal; rather just detergent and the faintest scent of expensive cologne.

Nervous eyes wandered until they met the bed behind him. If Hannibal had been laying there now, what a picture he would make. One that would need no photographing because it would burn itself into Will's retinas. One that he might take photos of regardless. He placed the shirt

at the edge of the bed and climbed upon it; taking the opposite side to that which Hannibal slept.

The pillows were so soft; softer than he could have ever imagined, softer than any other upon which he had ever laid his head. As he let his eyes narrow and his head lull towards the empty side of the bed, he found himself able to imagine the man who usually occupied it. Broad shoulders filling out the space, perhaps one would be touching his; the electric warmth shared between them. The sharp curves of Hannibal's face in profile would be even more so in the pale light.

When his eyes met Will's the place would seem alive with light compared to the darkness within those eyes; Will would will the darkness closer and closer until it consumed him. Shrouded together in the dark finally, they would see nothing but each other. Shifting slowly, he turned onto his side, facing the imagined Hannibal in the space next to him. Unclothed, his hand reached out towards Will's face until it rested upon his stubbled cheek. Will imagined burying himself into Hannibal's shoulder and chest. Savouring a deep breath, there was nothing but the scent of fresh linen. It was disappointing.

Arousal was building inside of him; warm and dirty and aching.

He sat up in the bed suddenly. as if just awoken from a horrific dream; this was wrong. *So wrong.*

He looked across the way. He needed to go home.

It was little less than a sprint as he bolted back through the house and across the street. As his shaky breath cut through the quiet of the small apartment, he could not help but let his eyes linger back across the street to the empty house from which he had just come.

Chapter 8

The conference had been about as entertaining as he had anticipated, but the lovely Alana Bloom had mentioned that her friend lived across the way from him. *How strange a coincidence.* How easy it had been to smooth-talk his way into finding out about his new neighbour. How easy it had been to find out about a certain individual currently confined in the Baltimore State Hospital. It was more than willingness but an *obligation* that he may aid the woman. And just like that, he had secured himself a date. The next week could not come around quick enough.

As soon as he entered through his front door, he smelt it. A scent for which he was becoming well-acquainted. An artificial musk; dogs; sweat. It was not an entirely unpleasant smell, but the cheap cologne that was intent on burning his nose was burdensome. The sooner he rid Will of such a burden the better. He took quickly up the stairs; it was late and he had patients to attend tomorrow.

As he reached the doorway to the bedroom, the corners of his lips could not help but turn upward. The aroma had made its way up here; finally, *he* had taken the plunge and willed himself deeper into the crypt. The air was thick with the scent and Hannibal let the sensation wash over him as he stepped through it. It was as if Will's very skin were on a platter before him; and yet, still not close enough to touch or to devour.

Not yet.

The bags he was carrying were left neatly in the corner where he could deal with them in the morning. Shrugging off his suit easily, he hung the pieces on the back of his closet door; leaving himself in only his white shirt and silk boxers. As he slowly walked towards the drawer where his pyjamas were kept, a glinting light caught his eye. His head turned towards the bed, scanning until he saw it; a wayward piece of glitter sitting on the pillow. As he leaned over to retrieve it, he suddenly realised the smell was permeating from the sheets.

A pleased grin played at the corners of his mouth as he craned his neck downwards. The smell of sweat; fear and arousal in equal measure tinged the pillow. Hannibal could not help himself but lower his head into it; allowing the scent to consume him. Where the smell of putrid aftershave had faded, his boy's scent had not. Will Graham had lain his head upon Hannibal's bed; the thought was tantalising. After so long waiting, watching, wishing to see and to feel, the boy had taken the step.

Coffee and cheap spirits, dirt and cheap soap all made up the scent that encapsulated his boy. Beneath all the artificial aromas, there was a crisp warmth; akin to petrichor and pine forests. It was glorious.

A squandered youth spent running upon the rain-soaked trees in search of more. And Hannibal would give to him everything he had ever sought.

He set himself down upon the bed, switching on the lamp as he went.

Across the way, he could see Will's shadowed form stalking about his room. The pretty head of curls that just begged to be pulled.

His fingers traced along the silk pillow; disappointing in that it did not become the supple skin he so wished to touch. Grabbing at it, hard and vicious; how he wondered the colours he could turn such milky skin.

Pillow in hand, he slowly began rutting against it. Finally bringing himself and Will closer together. The scent did little to replace the flesh, though. The time would come when he was finally able to savour the sweet flesh of his boy. And oh, how he would savour it.

His movements were slow, exaggerated, a show. Despite how he desperately *ached* , he was intent on waiting. If it were minutes or hours, it hardly mattered. In the end, the only recipient intended to see the show would tune in.

As the soft fabric rubbed against his hard length so delightfully, he wished Will could hear the moans he was responsible for.

He looked over again and to his delight, he saw him looking back.

His sweet, dirty boy was sat at his desk now, he could see how his arm moved and his head tipped back in delight. Hannibal had no doubts as to where Will's eyes had wandered. His thighs parted further and he took more animated thrusts to provide Will with what he wished to see. They were not close enough to touch and yet somehow, he could feel thick, calloused fingers more worn and wearier than his own. Will would stroke without grace, without rhythm; it would be needy and primal, giving in to his base desires to give and receive pleasure.

He gripped more tightly, more roughly. Smearing precum against the soft pillow beneath him, he rutted more and more determinedly until the sensation inside was spilling out. As he came, he closed his eyes and imagined parted lips, fluttering eyelashes, wet locks gripped in his fist; all covered in his come. His boy would have to sit pretty and depraved like that for as long as he told him. His scent staining itself into the white flesh. For now, their scents mingled upon the sheets would have to suffice Hannibal's need.

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He *should* tear his eyes away; he *should* close the curtains and go to sleep. If he were to let strange dreams overtake him, he could say that they were to blame for what he was seeing. When he woke up hard and aching, he could blame things he couldn't remember. Sweet dreams of pretty faces, pretty hands, pretty words.

But he wasn't dreaming.

He was awake and he was seeing and he was dirty. Dirty and guilty, and yet he couldn't bear to tear himself away from the sight. It had been days since he had seen the man; he had only looked to check on him, to see he was okay, to see that face once again. He hadn't known Hannibal was going to do this.

He hadn't known Hannibal would rest his back against the headboard. He hadn't known he was going to pull his penis from his underwear and start stroking himself. But he was, and from across the way, Will could do nothing but watch. And feel the way his cock was begin to fill out. A heat was brewing inside of him.

His head tipped back against the chair; he pretended he was not aware as his hand snaked down to his boxers. He was painfully hard and the mere touch of his fingers across his bulge made his whole body twitch in anticipation. But he was not thinking of his own hands. Dexterous fingers slowly snaked up to the waistband, pulling free his hardened cock. Steady practised movements knew exactly what they must do. Each stroke drew wanton moans from him.

With his free hand, he fumbled in his satchel until he found what he was looking for. His meticulously organised file on Dr Hannibal Lecter. His collection, every moment, every part of the doctor that he had revealed to him. It had just started with the photos that were available online, articles about him and his work, but now the collection had grown to photos of the man as he went about his day: work, home life, social events. It was all before Will in his scrapbook pages, but it wasn't enough. Fucking into his own dry palm was nothing compared to the thought of that mouth stretched and wet around his cock, maroon eyes staring up at him with an insatiable hunger.

In his mind, soft lips were suckling at the tip of his cock as it spilt pre-cum. Not a drop wasted; he turned the page again. His favourite photo was coming up, the way he had captured the veins under his skin, the tensed fingers gripped around the knife as they sliced the meat, an earnest concentration furrowed in the man's brow. He had look at the photo so many times it was burned into his brain.

The page flipped again. His heart stopped. His hand moved more rapidly up and down his throbbing cock.

Next to his photo, the best he had taken, another sat.

It was new.

It was different.

A younger face, still with the same carved cheekbones and curved lip line, eyes full of a confidence and a hunger that had diminished none despite the years that had passed since the photo was taken. It looked like it might have been taken for an ID; of course, Hannibal would manage to look like *that* even for an ID photograph.

Will hadn't put the photo there. Will knew every photo, every angle and shot, every location. He would not have forgotten a photo like this.

Someone else had put it there.

Dark eyes stared, not at the camera but at *him* . Directly at Will. And he could hold back no longer. Maroon eyes poured their hunger into the back of Will's skull as he messily jerked

himself off. Only when he came, beads of sticky white on his hand and thighs, could he finally look the photo in the eyes.

Chapter 9

Stepping into the elevator, Will regretted all decisions he had made since he had stepped out of his door at 7 am. Brain Zeller eyes widened in a mix of shock and trepidation; as if Will had materialised from thin air. Silently, Will stepped in next to him. The button for the 12th floor was already lit; he pressed the button to close the door and prayed that no one else would stop the lift on the way up. The seconds that he had been confined next to the man were more than enough.

They were on parking level 1, still 13 floors to go up. The skin around Will's thumbnail wasn't going to last as he nervously bit at it. Over and over, he told himself it would be worth it. If he managed to get into the event that he knew Hannibal would be attending all this fuss would be worth it.

"So, Will Graham, long time no see. What the hell are you doing here?" Zeller passed it off as a joke, light-hearted and friendly, but they both knew it was far from it.

It would have been nice not to reply, but there was no pretending he hadn't heard when all that cut the silence was the soft jazz music playing through the speaker. Normally in a situation like this, Will would just bolt away. There was no running now.

"Well, I do work here," Will replied, his best efforts to sound amiable were probably failing him.

"Yeah, *I know.* I thought the whole working from home thing was serving you well."

Will knew exactly what Zeller meant. *Even if it isn't serving you well, it is serving us well. We don't want you back here.* As much as he wished to, it was not worth biting. All that it would do was give his colleagues more to talk about him in *their* office.

"I've broken the top 5 stories in the last 3 months, so I'd say it is working out, yeah."

The silence was resounding, and Will did all he could to not let the corners of his mouth slip into a smile. Watching in his periphery, Zeller's eyes skirted between his wristwatch and the screen that told them their slow ascent up the building.

"Yet, you still don't put your name on them," It came out small, like a little Pomeranian barking at the passers-by at their owner's gate.

"Everyone knows what I write, Zeller, everyone knows what quality to expect."

An audible scoff left Zeller's mouth, but he refused to say anything else. Will's eyes were fixed on the slowly ascending number. A lift had never moved more slowly than this.

Neither of them found another word to speak to each other. What else was there to say? He supposed, if anything, that at least the impression he made when he had worked in the office had been maintained. It was much easier that way.

Stepping towards Prurnell's office, Will felt his pulse quicken – he wished he hadn't come.

Before he'd even knocked the door twice, she was seeing him in, offering tea or coffee, or whiskey, all of which Will denied. He sat down in the seat which he had not sat at for months – he expected it would feel different, but he was wrong. It felt just the same as the day they had decided it would be best if he no longer worked in the office.

"Will, it's good to see you. I was surprised when I heard you requested a meeting.,"Prurnell began, little time for niceties. "Surprised but mainly excited; you must have something *interesting* to discuss."

'Interesting' was easily translated to 'profitable'. As long as Will brought in clicks and views, he was indispensable.

"Yes, I have something new which I'm working on."

It was a lie, Will hadn't thought about work besides the bare minimum he needed to produce to keep him employed in weeks. It was easy to lie when your eyes never wandered to meet their gaze in the first place.

"It's only in the early stages, but I wonder if you might be able to help me get into an event so I can put some names to faces, do some scouting, that kind of thing."

"An event?" She sounded shocked. "Like a social event where others will be attending?"

Will's eyes scrunched closed as he nodded. Teeth chewed nervously at chapped lips. The ever-present headache which Will had had while working in the office gave him the perfect excuse to take a moment to rub his temples and *think.*

And then he knew exactly what he needed to say.

"I know... I know," Will tried to bring himself to meet eyes with the waiting man. "As much as it pains me to say it, I think socialising might be good for me. And I will have a focus this way – if it's too much, I can just focus on the job and get out once I've got what I'm looking for."

A perfect package of dedication to the job and supposed self-care. Will knew that Prurnell would eat it up. There was a renewed light in the man's eyes; the green glint of money and the esteem of being able to say that she was personally responsible for looking after the feeble thing which they all believed Will to be.

"If you give me some time to make a few calls, I can probably sort something out. But give me a... three-word synopsis that won't make me liable in a court case if it turns out to be nothing you can write about."

Will thought for a moment.

"...Illegal Psychiatric Malpractice?" Will said, and the slight glint in Prurnell's eye was enough to know he had succeeded in his task. "And the event is the Gala for the Relief of Child Hunger, it's the Saturday after next.

“Say no more,” She replied. It had a twofold meaning " *Say no more, I’m on it"* and " *Say no more, before you implicate me in something that I do not want to be implicated in if it isn’t going to get me more money"*.

Will had absolutely zero evidence to suggest such a thing was going on, but a news story being broken within the city would get the article broadcast on local news. National news was easy, but Prurnell always said that the best way to headhunt was to show that even the smallest salacious stories hidden in the smallest corners of the city showed off the prowess of the paper. Or perhaps, she was just eager to have Will follow a story that wouldn’t lead to her head on a platter being the prize of all the nations.

Prurnell would do anything if she thought she was going to get a good story out of him.

Will sat awkwardly in the chairs arranged outside his boss’ office. Never had he felt more like an outsider looking in. The seat which had been his desk had been filled by a new employee; they were able to laugh along with the shitty office banter, smile at people who did not deserve to be smiled at, focus on their tasks despite every little noise and movement that would not cease in the room. Will had never been gladder that he had left.

“Does your boyfriend know which articles you write?” The familiar, incessant voice pulled Will from his musings. All the reply he gave Zeller was a cold stare, but still, he decided to repeat the question.

“I wouldn’t know.”

“He doesn’t praise them on every occasion. Shower you with love, *gifts*. ”

Will refused to rise to it; he could hear Prurnell on the phone in the room behind him. This was more important than the satisfaction he might gain from slapping Zeller and wiping the smirk from his face. Head still rested in his hands, he leaned up slightly to better address Zeller. Still, their eyes did not meet.

“I wouldn’t know because he is locked up in the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane *and* he’s not my boyfriend.”

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that,” Zeller clearly knew all of this already, and it had certainly been a topic of office gossip once Will had left, but now presented with the solemn, tired face of Will Graham, it seemed that the joke had lost its humour.

“Sorry to hear that he’s a psychotic serial murderer or that he’s not my boyfriend?”

“Both?”

The office door swung open beside them and Will stood up to greet the wide smile on Prurnell’s face which only meant one thing – as she always did, she had succeeded in getting what she wanted.

A gentle hand came to grip Zeller’s shoulder, “Yeah, thanks” was all Will managed before he slipped away to speak to his boss. Zeller stood awkwardly for a moment, scratching his neck

awkwardly before finally turning on his heels and returning to his station.

“I got you in,” She beamed.

“Thank you, thank you. Should I come back in to collect the pass or –?”

“I’ll email you everything you need, don’t worry Will.”

He thanked her again, shaking the woman's palm earnestly. As he walked back through the office and towards the elevator, he did not even turn back once to gesture his goodbye.

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It hadn’t taken much persuading; a sweet word, a concerned raise of the brow, a plea to try and make Alana’s life easier. The Bentley rolled up outside of the BSHCI and Hannibal quickly exited the vehicle. The security all knew who he was – it was easy to walk through the front doors and down the quieted halls when you had been given a personal invitation.

After his brief restroom stop, Hannibal was escorted to the visiting room. As he entered, he saw the man he was waiting for, chained and annoyed to be called out of his cell for someone he had no interest in talking to.

“Who the fuck are you?”

“I’m Dr Hannibal Lecter.”

The man laughed, a mirthless thing – pitiful and pitying in equal measure. It was as if even he was not sure who his laugh was directed.

But then he looked up, eyes meeting Hannibal’s and it was undeniable that it was a beast to whom he was speaking. A lesser beast, undoubtedly. But not one who should be messed with unless the proper security had been in place.

His boy had been wasted on this ill-tempered beast. Chains and glass, barbs and metal would ensure he never tainted Will again.

“I thought Dr Bloom had given up on sending shrinks to set me right. Are you going to ask about my alcoholic father or the boys who bullied me in 11th grade?” He goaded.

“No,” Hannibal replied, and he pulled out the chair and sat across from the man. “Not at all, Matthew. I am not here to talk about *you.* I am here to talk about Will Graham.”

At that, a jagged curl formed across his lips. Both glad to hear the name and disgusted that another would mention him. It was an immediate reaction, inevitable in fact, without saying a word he knew Matthew was aware that he was losing his *supposed* claim over Will.

“Why?”

“Is it so wrong to ask? I had been led to believe you knew each other well, but if I was wrong then there is little point in continuing our discussion,” Hannibal made to stand, a deliberate

movement that echoed the slow whirring of Matthew's mind.

It was clear that he felt deprived, deprived of being devoid of Will for so long – and Hannibal could understand. But he would never find himself so foolish as to get caught and be forced away from his boy.

Only when his arm reached out to knock the door did Matthew, desperately, frantically, answer.

"Will and I have a connection. It is not something he could just forget," Matthew pleaded.

Hannibal pulled off his jacket and placed it on the back of the chair before returning to his seat.

"It has been months, Mr Brown," Hannibal reminded. "Don't you want Will to move on if you are to be housed here for the foreseeable future?"

"Maybe Will and I know what is best for each other far more than anyone else."

The slight snarl that raised Hannibal's top lip was quickly pushed down; unseen by Mr Brown as he continued his lament.

"Everyone thinks that they have Will all figured out. That he is something weak that might break, but he is far more capable than anyone gives him credit for."

"You have maintained that Will had no part in your crimes, yet what you are saying suggests otherwise," Hannibal asked it with a hint of concern, of naivety.

Matthew's head craned backwards, grin wide and eyes flitting underneath his lids as if watching some imagined scene. Hannibal wondered which of his murders he was calling. He brought his eyes back to Hannibal's, the smirk still violent and wild. For all the restraint which the handcuffs gave him, Matthew was doing all he could to use his hands.

"You hear that?" His eyes searched the room for something intangible, as his fingers fluttered manically in the air.

His eyes trained back to Hannibal; waiting for an answer. Lulling his head to the side was the only answer Hannibal would provide the man.

"I used to work here, did a bit of everything really. That goddamn insistent buzzing; power through the lines as eagle eyes watched and listened to every single word. There is no buzzing now, Dr Lecter. It will be quite a shame when Dr Bloom realises there is no record of this interview," He clung his hands together, harshly enough that the metallic scent of blood made its way through the stale air. "What *interest* do you have in him?"

"Will Graham is special," Hannibal answered, watching the way Matthew's eyes narrowed at the name on his lips. "I think we can both agree that. I only wish to help him be himself."

"You don't even know Will. I don't think he'd enjoy the likes of you."

It was hard to keep his face neutral, to not think of the pretty boy across the way. To think of how his lingering gaze and his lingering scent did more than just *enjoy* .

“Matthew, you can hardly say you know the boy either. How long has it been since you last got a visit?”

The man across from him tensed his jaw and pulled his eyes away; Hannibal knew that Will had not seen him once since his incarceration. He also knew that it was Alana’s consistent refusals until Will had given up that had stopped him from visiting, but Matthew did not. And he was more than keen to keep it that way.

Even if Will made poor choices, Hannibal was not one to shy away from the admiration of loyalty. Even if it were loyalty so plainly misplaced.

“I just want to ask you some questions pertaining to our *mutual interest* .”

“Why the fuck would I tell you anything about him? Just ask him yourself if you know him so well.”

“The possessive tendencies which you feel towards Will, did his empathy drive him to return such feelings to you?”

A full-bodied laugh ripped from Matthew. Suddenly he felt he had the winning hand. Suddenly he felt the information that he divulged was such that Dr Hannibal Lecter could have no idea. The feigned ignorance drew from Mr Brown the very aggrandising bravado that Hannibal had known was within him. Matthew felt he held bragging rights over the boy and was suddenly more than willing to proclaim his knowledge in front of what he believed was a less-knowing being.

“I needn’t do anything to Will for him to be that way. Only before we met, he’d never found someone who was a near match to his... *dedication* ,” Matthew was almost sighing, fond recollection overtaking him. It was despicable.

“You believe Will Graham was as *dedicated* to you as you were to him.”

“I don’t think that is strong enough of a word, but stronger words might serve to harm him...” The usual vibrance with which Matthew spoke was dulled in favour of genuine concern.

“Who would have reason to harm Will? And over your actions?” Hannibal quirked his brow and leaned in; the appearance of a man intent with anticipation.

“The sweet delicate flower that Will is, to all around him, is a wonderful cover, and I have no intention of impeding that. ‘Blind and naïve’ is a far sight better than ‘Silent and enabling’.”

“So, he did know about the things you did?” Hannibal felt his heart swell at the thought.

“If you actually know Will at all, you’ll know it takes a careful act to get past him... And I was doing very little to maintain any sort of façade. I bought home the papers or switched on the television to allow him to see what I had done.”

“He knew, but he didn’t partake? He wasn’t there with you then?”

“Does one usually plan the gifts their lover is going to give to them?”

The word *lover* stirred venom within Hannibal’s throat; he wished to spit it at Matthew and watch as his face blistered. If it weren’t for the setting, Hannibal might have bored his pencil through Matthew’s wretched, beady eyes.

“But a lover knows when a gift is given,” Hannibal answered. “All seven accolades and he did nothing to stop you?”

“What could have dear Will done to stop me, Dr Lecter?”

The vision of blood spattered across Will’s glasses, eyes glassing over with determination and want, and well-worked hands squeezing out life was nothing short of deific. The perfect image needed not Mr Brown’s inclusion; Hannibal was more than content to see himself in the man’s place. Mr Brown did not deserve something so intimate as Will’s fingers digging against the fragile flesh of his neck.

“I think we can both wonder that. You, however, won’t get to see it.”

“What are you going to do to him?” Matthew asked, his voice wavered despite the casual façade to which he was trying to cling.

“Nothing. Just as you did nothing to him.”

“And what happens if I tell someone about this conversation?”

“Dr Bloom is a good woman who doesn’t treat her patients like lesser individuals, but still there is only so much she will listen to the whims of an imprisoned psychopath over an esteemed colleague,” Hannibal stood, brushing at his suit jacket and stepping around the chair. “You should probably start behaving yourself. You’ll have poor Dr Bloom rushed off her feet... If you dropped such a bombshell just envision the collateral you might cause.”

Smoothly, Hannibal took his coat from the back of the chair and pulled it on. The fire in Matthew’s eyes was close to singeing him. It was mesmerising to imagine what the man might have done given the opportunity. He was tempted to tell him how to dislocate his thumb just to see how he might attempt it.

Another time perhaps.

He began walking to the door. For now, there was nothing more which Hannibal wanted from Matthew.

“And what if I do manage to convince Dr Bloom?”

The words were spat like the last embers of a raging fire, all Matthew could do to rear his head in the last moments before Hannibal left. Hannibal stilled at the words but remained facing the door.

“Wouldn’t it be unfortunate if a backup recorder was found miraculously in my coat pocket? Everything you have said no longer lost. It would be a shame for Will to be embroiled in all this, wouldn’t it? You wouldn’t get to read his articles, see that *dedication* which no longer veers in your direction.”

The rustling of chains against the table gave Hannibal all the sweet satisfaction. If Matthew could have killed him now would have been the time when he leapt. A caged beast could do nothing to hurt him. A caged beast could do nothing at all. And Hannibal knew for all Matthew’s wit, he would be unable to force the same confinement upon the boy who he wished was his.

“Choices, choices, choices, Mr Brown. You wouldn’t take the dear boy’s freedom away, now, would you?”

“Fuck you,” Matthew spat. “That *choice* of tie doesn’t match your suit.”

“See you again, Matthew.”

End Notes

I hope you like it so far! I won't be having a strict upload schedule, so it will just be as and when I am ready to upload the next chapter. I imagine there are going to be able 25 chapters in total!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!